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Technical cooperation among developing countries

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Summary of the general debate

A. Overview

1. The general debate was begun by Iran's representative speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He welcomed the positive and encouraging developments in the expansion of technical cooperation among developing countries and the growth of innovative and new patterns of cooperation and collaboration during the biennium under report. He pointed out that the South Summit held in Havana in September 2000 considered South-South cooperation as an effective instrument for optimizing development through sharing the resources and expertise of the developing countries and complementing cooperation with developed countries. He noted with satisfaction the greater involvement of developing countries as providers or recipients of TCDC or both and the improvement in the policy and institutional environment for TCDC in these countries. He acknowledged that the increasing sophistication and complexity of TCDC activities, greater regional and inter-country cooperation among developing countries, increased resource allocations for TCDC by developing countries, greater emphasis on long-term cooperation and enhanced modalities of triangular cooperation marked the maturity of the emerging trends in the area of TCDC observed in the previous biennium.

2. He applauded the role of the Special Unit for TCDC in promoting and expanding the scope and vision for TCDC and welcomed the endeavours of the Administrator to give priority to TCDC in the work of UNDP generally. While commending the focus of TCDC on strategic interventions involving large numbers of countries and longer-term commitment, he cautioned that short- and medium-term activities should not be neglected. He commended the close collaboration and cooperation of the Special Unit for TCDC with intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions of the South.

3. He acknowledged the important and leading role of the pivotal TCDC countries and especially their increased allocation of resources for TCDC. He stated that their capacities as well as successful interventions should be documented and

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disseminated through WIDE. He also urged the donor countries to leverage these increased resource allocations with additional assistance in the interest of rapid and cost-effective global economic development.

4. He stated that TCDC activities should not only be promoted but successful activities should also be adequately reported and disseminated in order to ensure a multiplier impact on development. He also emphasized the importance of regional economic cooperation and integration in meeting the challenges of globalization and suggested that collaboration among such regional groups should be instituted and enhanced.

5. He concluded by submitting that in general, the strengthening of TCDC as a means of promoting cooperation for development has been constrained by a lack of resources despite all the advances made in its application by the developing countries and recommended various measures for this purpose, including innovative mechanisms to promote and enhance TCDC activities, partnership of the private sector and NGOs in TCDC activities, increased contributions by donors to the core resources of UNDP, and contribution to the Voluntary Trust Fund for South-South Cooperation.

6. The delegate from Sweden, speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Central and East European countries associated with the European Union (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and the associated countries (Cyprus, Malta and Turkey), confirmed that TCDC has an important role to play in achieving the goals and objectives of international development set by the Millennium Summit in 2000. TCDC should in particular enhance local, national and regional capacities and continue to be an important element in national development policies as well as in policies of other development actors, including the United Nations system. He stated that South-South cooperation has a special role in areas such as governance, capacity-building, technical assistance and exchanges of best practices, particularly on issues relating to health, education, professional training, environment, science and technology, trade, investment and transit transport cooperation.

7. He expressed satisfaction at the more active role of developing countries with regard to TCDC activities. He also welcomed the adoption by developing countries of more sophisticated and comprehensive approaches and strategies to meet development challenges and commended long-term engagement in programmes such as poverty reduction. The increasing involvement of the civil society in TCDC, giving due place to the private sector and NGOs, was also noted as a propitious development.

8. He reiterated that responsibility for taking the initiative to implement and secure the financing of TCDC rests primarily with the developing countries themselves and it is their commitment on which the success of TCDC depends. He also welcomed the new developments in triangular cooperation in areas such as human resource development and research and institutional capacity-building.

9. The representative of the European Union concluded by stating that TCDC could certainly help States to meet the challenges of globalization and benefit from the opportunities it offers. He supported the work of the United Nations system to promote TCDC in all relevant programmes and thought that the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process provides an excellent entry

point for UNDP and other United Nations Development Group (UNDG) partners to mainstream TCDC into programmes.

10. Most members indicated their support for the views expressed by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. They appreciated the progress in the application of the TCDC modality and were pleased by the lead role of the pivotal countries in expanding TCDC. It was considered that expertise available in the developing countries taken together was by no means inadequate, but in order to find solutions to development problems and meet the challenges of globalization, it was necessary to pool and share experiences and coordinate strategies and techniques. Broad-based partnership in any economic or social development initiative was the refrain of the statements by most members.

11. There was universal recognition of the importance of human resource development in meeting the challenges of both sustainable development and the process of globalization. All countries emphasized the overarching role of TCDC in capacity-building and noted that significant progress had been achieved in this respect in the biennium under consideration. It was noted that TCDC was most pronounced in the field of education and training and many developing countries were well equipped to impart quality education and training. Even in research and development, the pooled capacities of developing countries was quite rich and with complementary northern input, it could be further enhanced. The field of capacity development was also the area where triangular cooperation was playing a big role.

12. Despite all the progress and the innovations in the use of the TCDC modality and the increased allocation of physical, human and financial resources for TCDC by developing countries, resource constraint was identified as the most serious impediment to development cooperation. The increase in voluntary contributions to development aid, allocation of more resources for triangular cooperation, and direct donor support of TCDC and ECDC initiatives were recommended by most members.

13. In the interactive exchange, the meeting identified weaknesses of national TCDC focal points, particularly in Africa, as a serious bottleneck. Institutional strength and quality of human resources surfaced repeatedly as the main focus of most interventions. The upgrading of capacity in the least developed countries (LDCs) and enhancement of their absorptive capacity also featured as an area of special attention for TCDC. Lack of inexpensive access to scientific literature and technological innovations for common use also appeared to be a constraint in harnessing science and technology for development. There was the call for harmonization or coordination of activities by the developing countries to face the challenges of globalization. Some members pointed out that while horizontal cooperation within a region was not so difficult, interregional cooperation needed some intermediary such as the Special Unit for TCDC or Economic and Social Commissions. Some members wanted to know more about the resources and programmes of both the Voluntary Trust Fund for South-South Cooperation and the Perez-Guerrero Trust Fund. A few members also expressed a desire for interaction with the Special Unit between the biennial meetings of the Committee and a proactive role for the Special Unit in expanding TCDC and ECDC. Both the President and the Director of the Special Unit for TCDC assured the delegations that there would be continuous dialogue with members to address emerging problems and that the Special Unit would play a proactive role in South-South cooperation.

B. Comprehensive biennial report of the progress made in the implementation of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action as well as the decisions of the High-level Committee

14. Most countries provided detailed information about their TCDC and South-South cooperation policies, strategies, institutional arrangements, programmes and initiatives. Some United Nations organizations as well as intergovernmental organizations supplemented the information provided in the Administrator's report (TCDC/12/1).

15. It was evident from the debate that most developing countries had strengthened their institutional capacity for managing TCDC and many had clearly articulated their policies on this modality. They were supplementing public undertakings by drawing in the private sector as well as the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Many also took the opportunity while describing their policies and strategies to give further information on their programmes and financial allocations for TCDC, but a few regretted that their national TCDC focal points were either not well organized or not functioning well and thus they could not benefit significantly from South-South cooperation. They sought support from the Special Unit for TCDC to improve their capacity and suggested that regional meetings of national TCDC focal points represented a useful mechanism for learning about initiating and managing TCDC. One member lamented that while the Latin America and the Caribbean region was reaping important benefits from TCDC, Africa was lagging far behind.

16. There was general appreciation of the greater interest of the United Nations development system and UNDP in particular in promoting and expanding TCDC. Some delegations emphasized the need for greater involvement of the country offices of UNDP in the TCDC initiatives of member countries. Cases of triangular cooperation were often cited as an endorsement of the new approach on forging broad-based partnerships in TCDC, which ensured more and better technical services at minimal cost. Some countries suggested that triangular cooperation should be considered a new model for development cooperation. At the same time, many countries urged further action on mainstreaming TCDC in the activities of the United Nations organizations and greater donor support of TCDC initiatives.

17. Since the meeting of the High-level Committee followed the Third United Nations Conference on LDCs and preceded the conference on financing for development, many delegations brought up the question of special measures for the LDCs. The plight of the landlocked countries also came up for consideration. It was acknowledged that other developing countries could mitigate the difficulties of these groups of countries by sharing their experiences and techniques and collaborating on technical cooperation programmes. It was important to identify the areas of cooperation and then concentrate on them. Most countries felt that partnerships, both broad-based and of long duration, had the potential to assist these disadvantaged countries in a significant manner.

18. Regional cooperation among developing countries was considered by many delegations as a very important step in the process of integration into the global economy because it could provide the capacity to withstand the difficulties involved in the globalization and liberalization process. It could also upgrade the institutional and human resource base that would enable the countries to adapt to globalization. Some delegations emphasized the need for improved coordination of the strategies

and activities of groups of developing countries for a process of gradual integration into the global economy. They also suggested wider coverage of this subject in the Administrator's report.

C. Biennial report on the progress made in the implementation of the new directions strategy for technical cooperation among developing countries

19. All delegations taking the floor confirmed that the new directions strategy has placed TCDC in the mainstream of development enterprise in the new era of globalization and liberalization. Most delegations spoke about their participation in activities of strategic focus in partnership with other countries and gains from such programmes. The new directions strategy has led to expanded TCDC, broader partnership programmes and support through triangular arrangements.

20. Cooperation in science and technology was highlighted by most delegations as a crucial element in economic development. The knowledge available in the South was both relevant and high in quality and it was not difficult to pool and share it owing to the developments in information technology. There were many fields for propitious cooperation for development such as food security, health care and sanitation, information technology, clean and renewable energy, building technology, and urban management. A coordinated plan of action was needed that would be based on the ideal of sharing and concerted initiative. On issues of globalization such as trade, investment, debt, standardization, environment or mobility of labour, the urgent requirement was for convergence of ideas and experiences and coordinated negotiation or action. Learning from one another and emulating the best practices held the key to smoothing the process of integration into the global economy.

21. Dissemination of knowledge and use of information technology, which is one of the cornerstones of the new directions strategy, attracted the attention of most countries. Most countries considered that the gathering and sharing of knowledge held the key to success in the development enterprise and that the information revolution had the potential to make that success an achievable target. Many members drew attention to the need to compile best practices or successful experiences and disseminate them promptly. While the array of services provided by WIDE was appreciated by most delegations, all of them asked for enhancement of its quality. They asked for easy access to the knowledge stored within the United Nations development system through WIDE. In this context they also requested prompt updating of WIDE databases. Further they requested increased connectivity between WIDE and other databases maintained by national, regional and academic organizations. Some also felt that WIDE must be made more user-friendly.

22. Most countries noted with satisfaction that the pivotal countries had become hubs and benefactors for TCDC and that simultaneously, two-way cooperation between countries was increasing significantly, enhancing one another's capacities. Many countries thought that the role of the pivotal countries in development cooperation could be further expanded and made more meaningful with support from developed countries as well as from the United Nations development system. The capacities of pivotal countries needed to be better documented, the specialized field of expertise of each country needed to be more clearly identified and their lead

role in TCDC activities required supplementary financial support. WIDE could be usefully exploited to advertise capacities of pivotal countries and successful experiences of their TCDC initiatives.

23. Most countries found it beneficial that horizontal cooperation, which had been primarily at the bilateral and subregional level, had begun to reach out to the regional and interregional levels. In their view, expansion of cooperation beyond bilateral partners and regional and interregional initiatives enhanced the scope and quality of South-South cooperation. It was also recognized that such initiatives required intermediation by the Special Unit for TCDC and other intergovernmental, multilateral or private sector organizations. In this context, many countries appreciated the collaboration of the United Nations development system, and particularly of UNDP, with non-governmental and private sector institutions.

24. Most countries expressed satisfaction with the growth of triangular cooperation arrangements but considered them inadequate in responding to the financing needs of South-South cooperation. It was noted that sudden crises had a dampening effect on the capacity of developing countries to allocate resources for TCDC. It was further noted that decline in official development assistance (ODA) and a reduction in voluntary contributions to the core resources for UNDP were adversely affecting development cooperation as a whole. There was an urgent appeal to arrest this trend.

25. Many countries were encouraged by the report on propitious movement, in a number of cases, towards integration of TCDC and ECDC. Some delegations commented that this was essential for rapid economic growth in the South. The success of TCDC in the long run lay in the growth of ECDC. Only in this way could a lasting contribution to sustainable economic development be made.

D. Consideration of the reports of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

26. Most delegations acknowledged the special role of the United Nations development system in promoting and expanding TCDC and also complimented the commitment of United Nations organizations to TCDC. It was emphasized, however, that in the operational activities of the United Nations development system, TCDC needs to be mainstreamed through specific mechanisms and practices. The importance of the Guidelines for the review of policies and procedures of the United Nations development system was highlighted in this context. Some countries suggested that the reporting format for TCDC activities should be incorporated into the Guidelines and that other measures should be considered to achieve mainstreaming.

27. Inquiries about the resources of trust funds and the activities supported by them were made by some delegations. The low level of contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for South-South Cooperation was noted. The contributions announced by China ($250,000) and the Republic of Korea ($50,000) for the year 2001 were warmly received. The contributions of the Government of Japan to TCDC through its Japan Human Resources Development Fund, totalling $11.4 million for the biennium 1999-2000 was acclaimed.

28. Some countries requested higher pledges to the core resources of UNDP. Most countries urged generous contributions from both developed and developing countries to the Voluntary Trust Fund for South-South Cooperation.

29. Most delegations appreciated the work of the Special Unit for TCDC and its support to the implementation of the new directions strategy. They reiterated the need to ensure that the Special Unit is adequately staffed to enable it to continue to discharge its duties for the promotion and expansion of TCDC in a befitting manner.